

University of Nebraska - Lincoln

DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln

Great Plains Quarterly

Great Plains Studies, Center for

Fall 2010

Review of *Delaware Tribe in a Cherokee Nation* by Brice Obermeyer

Dawn G. Marsh
Purdue University

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/greatplainsquarterly>



Part of the [American Studies Commons](#), [Cultural History Commons](#), and the [United States History Commons](#)

Marsh, Dawn G., "Review of *Delaware Tribe in a Cherokee Nation* by Brice Obermeyer" (2010). *Great Plains Quarterly*. 2614.

<https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/greatplainsquarterly/2614>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Great Plains Studies, Center for at DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln. It has been accepted for inclusion in Great Plains Quarterly by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln.

Delaware Tribe in a Cherokee Nation. By Brice Obermeyer. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2009. xviii + 319 pp. Notes, references, index. \$45.00.

The federal acknowledgment process is a highly contested procedure under the best of circumstances. For the Delaware Tribe of Oklahoma the negotiations to establish their national identity while living within the physical boundaries of the Cherokee Nation continue to divide its members and challenge modern interpretations of enrollment. Brice Obermeyer, a cultural anthropologist at Emporia State University and NAGPRA representative for the Delaware Tribe, provides a comprehensive discussion of this historic relationship.

Obermeyer summarizes the histories that brought the Cherokees and Delawares to eastern Oklahoma and the legal efforts to establish an independent Delaware identity since the 1867 Cherokee-Delaware Agreement. He argues that the Delawares are not culturally or historically related to the Cherokees despite the legally imposed Cherokee identity. In perhaps his most nuanced argument, Obermeyer argues that the signing of the 1867 agreement was divisive and reflected a schism within the kin-based

groups of Delaware who relocated after 1829 from the White River region in Indiana. The schism, broadly defined, fell along lines of those Delawares who became Christians and those who continued to honor the Big House ceremony. In what Obermeyer describes as a "veiled Delaware cultural geography," he analyzes Delaware settlement patterns within the Cherokee lands. While both lineages resisted being subsumed ethnically as Cherokee, the author suggests that these divisions informed the expression of that resistance.

Obermeyer offers a history of the Delaware Tribe's interactions with the federal government that underscores the on-again, off-again status of their federal recognition due to Cherokee challenges. At the time of publication, the Delaware Tribe's federal recognition had been revoked in 2004. However, in August 2009 their federal acknowledgment was restored conditional to their submission to the authority of the Cherokee Nation regarding any development, trust land, or federal programs on Cherokee lands. Obermeyer also offers an analysis of Delaware voting patterns, demonstrating that the majority of enrolled voters are absentees. Getting elected to the tribal government "requires the support of a select group of locally active lineage representatives who possess a large absentee voting kinship network."

Obermeyer's research is a careful contribution to Delaware history and the contemporary issues of federal acknowledgment. The only area lacking is the marked absence of the relationship between the Delaware Tribe and the Delaware Nation in Anadarko, Oklahoma, the only other federally recognized Delaware Nation in the United States. Otherwise Obermeyer's work is commendable.

DAWN G. MARSH
Department of History
Purdue University